



PHOTO: METRO GRAPHICS

Ways For Making Hay

Times Have Changed, And So Have Methods For Putting Up Quality Hay

From SDSU Extension

BROOKINGS — The days of cutting hay on an International H or M tractor with a sickle mower are long gone for most, says Julie Walker, SDSU Extension Beef Specialist. “It seemed like a field took forever to finish cutting. I clearly remember the day that Dad purchased a 12-foot mower with conditioner. Boy could you lay down the hay with that piece of equipment,” Walker said, of her childhood growing up on a farm in Minnesota. “Needless to say, hay equipment has improved over the last few decades.” Although equipment has improved, there are still many decisions Walker says producers still need to make to ensure hay quality is adequate. The decisions producers make as managers of forage resources will hopefully reduce the amount of supplementation that will be required to meet the animal nutrient requirements.

WHAT IS HIGH QUALITY HAY?

“Many producers would say quality hay is green in color, free of mold and weeds, has a high portion of leaves and it was put up without rain on it,” said Walker, adding that although these are good indicators of high quality hay, they don’t tell producers anything about the nutritional content of the forage. Sampling is the best way to understand the nutritional content of forage, Walker says. “Producers need to sample the hay once it is in the stack and send the sample to a lab for nutritional analysis. This is essential to understanding its true quality,” she said.

What are the best management practices that should be considered to improve the odds of getting a stack of high quality hay? To answer this question, Walker first asks producers if they go for quantity, or quality? “Forage has the highest digestibility in the vegetative stage, and is less digestible at seed stage. As the plant matures from vegetative to seed stage, the digestibility decreases and the amount of biomass available for harvest increases,” she says. Research has shown that forage cut at or near sundown has higher energy compared to morning. “This is a natural physiological process in plants wherein concentrations of soluble carbohydrates and other highly digestible nutrients are highest after a full day of sunshine and photosynthesis,” Walker said. She adds that tall enough stubble height should be left to aid in drying as well as improves pickup performance. “However, too high of stubble height will reduce yields,” she says. Correct hay curing (drying) is the next step. Walker says various factors can reduce hay quality during the drying phase, these include; respiration, weather and loss of leaves. Some tips she shares to speed up curing include; using a mower conditioner speeds drying by opening the waxy layer surrounding the stems in legumes; large and/or coarse stemmed forages have shown faster drying when conditioned. Wider swaths also allow for faster drying. Raking should be avoided if possible when the forage moisture is less than 40 percent.

Hay desiccants are used to reduce the amount of time required for hay drying. The commonly used hay desiccants are potassium carbonate or sodium carbonate, which are sprayed onto the hay during the cutting phase. Walker says hay desiccants are effective on alfalfa, clover and birdsfoot trefoil to remove the moisture-conserving waxy cutin layer of the plant, however, they are ineffective on grasses such as orchardgrass, timothy and brome grass. “When considering using hay desiccants remember to include the cost of the chemical as well as the sprayer for application,” she said. Walker adds that reducing leaf loss during the baling phase is key to maintaining quality. “Baling at moisture content above 15 percent, has less leaf loss than below 15 percent. Typical moisture content of the bales needs to be below 18 to 20 percent to prevent mold growth,” she said. “When putting up hay with higher moisture content other management steps need to be implemented to ensure maintaining hay quality as well as reducing the risk of fire. Feed costs are a large portion of your annual cow cost, so managing the forage resource to get a quality hay product, which will reduce the need for additional supplementation, can ultimately reduce the feed bill. For more information visit, www.igrow.org.

SDSU: Explore Traditional Dry Hay Alternatives

BROOKINGS — Harvesting quality feedstuffs can sometimes be a challenge. It can be especially challenging in late spring or early summer when too often there isn’t enough time between rain events to get forages completely cured and dry enough to be baled as dry hay, says Warren Rusche, SDSU Extension Cow/Calf Field Specialist. Rusche says a number of hay producers have explored haylage and baleage as methods that allow them to harvest without needing to deal with rained on forage. “The largest single advantage is that the hay only needs to wilt to about 35 to 45 percent dry matter; it does not have to completely cure,” Rusche said. “That means a shorter time interval between cutting and harvest and reduced risk of losing forage nutrients due to rain. Also there should be less leaf shattering by chopping at a higher moisture content which should result in higher quality, more valuable forage.” Rusche says there are some tradeoffs to harvesting forage as haylage. “The most obvious is different equipment is needed compared to baling hay,” he says of producers needing to either purchase or hire the necessary chopping, hauling and storage equipment — unless the operation already had that equipment on hand. Also, haylage may require more labor. “For instance, there may be a need for one person running the chopping equipment, one hauling away from the field, plus one more running either the bagger or packing tractor; whereas harvesting the forage as baled hay could probably be accomplished with just one person,” he said. He encourages producers to remember that once the haylage crop is harvested and stored there won’t be any additional labor required.

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WARREN RUSCHE

“Baled hay would still need to be loaded, hauled and stacked before the forage could be fed,” Rusche said. “A producer also needs to keep in mind that moving haylage involves handling a significant amount of water. This does limit marketing alternatives if the producer decides to sell rather than feed, as dry hay is easier to transport and more marketable.” Just as with baled hay, proper storage techniques are necessary to prevent excessive losses before feeding. In the case of haylage, keeping oxygen out of the bag, bunker or silo is critical to keeping dry matter losses to a minimum. “It’s very important to sufficiently pack the pile to eliminate

air pockets and to increase the density of the bunker,” Rusche said. “Bunker silos or piles need to be covered to prevent a layer of spoiled feedstuffs. Also, bags and bunker covers alike need to be checked during the storage period to make sure that there aren’t any holes in the plastic to let in air.” Another hay method that is becoming more popular is to use a specialized baler to create high moisture bales, or baleage. In this system, Rusche explains the bale is entirely covered with a plastic wrap to exclude oxygen. “This method eliminates the need for a separate chopper and hauling system, while still allowing a producer to harvest at higher moisture levels,” he said.

He says the plastic wrapping does present some challenges, however. “First, these bales need to be handled carefully to avoid creating holes and allowing air to contact the forage. Second, there would be a significant amount of plastic to be disposed of with each bale. A producer should consider how that waste would be disposed before adopting this system,” Rusche said. Rusche adds that adopting either of these higher moisture harvest methods would lead to some additional expenses for plastic wrap, fuel, labor, etc. “The hay producer needs to evaluate that added cost with the potential for improved forage quality and determine if alternatives to dry baled hay make economic sense for their business,” he said. To learn more about this topic, and listen to an iGrow Radio Network interview with Warren Rusche, visit iGrow.org.

Start Scouting Now For Grasshoppers

PIERRE — South Dakota faces the possibility of destructive grasshopper outbreaks every year, and predicting those outbreaks before they happen can be challenging. Experts look at current weather conditions and survey data from previous years to predict what might happen this year. While a widespread outbreak is unlikely, the potential is definitely there for isolated problem areas across the state. Early scouting is the key to effectively controlling problem grasshoppers. Grasshoppers go through five nymphal stages before adulthood. They are most susceptible to treatments as nymphs. Once grasshoppers reach adulthood, they are much tougher to control. Since they begin laying eggs immediately, spraying too late will not break their life cycle. Grasshopper densities across South Dakota reached historic levels in the summer of 2010. Last year threatened to be one of the worst grasshopper years since the early 1930s, but Mother Nature intervened. Early warmth followed by a cool wet May and June helped keep the grasshoppers in check naturally. Newly hatched grasshoppers are very susceptible to cold, wet weather that increases the prevalence of bacteria and disease that can cause mortality. Although those weather patterns helped to limit early hatching species, late hatching species thrived with surplus vegetation, moderate temperatures, and a late frost. Perfect conditions late last summer will likely result in escalating grasshopper population numbers this summer. Reports have been received in the past two weeks of hatches starting in the southern tier of South Dakota counties and progressing north. If the hatch progresses at a normal pace, mid-June will be the perfect time for control activities. The South Dakota Department of Agriculture, USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service, and SDSU Extension Service will be collaborating to keep the public informed about grasshopper conditions and provide producers with tailored information on grasshopper treatment options.

SDSU Extension Launches sheepSD

BROOKINGS — SDSU Extension encourages South Dakota sheep producers to sign up for an exciting new learning opportunity called sheepSD. This 3-year course is modeled after SDSU Extension’s Beginning Farmer/Rancher Program called beefSD. sheepSD has adopted the American Sheep Industry Association Goals to grow the industry to a point of economic sustainability for all levels of the sheep industry. sheepSD is designed to :

- Help potential and beginning sheep ranchers enter and expand into the sheep industry.
- Provide mentorship for beginning sheep ranchers from successful, established sheep ranchers.
- Develop production and management skills for producer efficiency, profitability & sustainability.
- Establish perpetual learning communities of sheep producers that will continue to seek knowledge and skills toward becoming progressive and prosperous ranchers.
- Gain perspective of the global sheep industry and participate in marketing of industry products.

Applications will be accepted through June 15, 2012. Producers will be selected based on their applications and an interview process which will begin in June and wrap up August. South Dakota Sheep Grower’s Association members and SDSU personnel will participate in the interview and selection process. An initial orientation meeting will occur the end of August followed by the official announcement of participants at the South Dakota Sheep Grower’s Convention on Sept. 29 at the Golden Hills Resort in Lead. To request an application, contact or Dave Ollila, SDSU Extension Sheep Field Specialist (605) 394-1722, or Jeff Held, SDSU State Sheep Specialist (605) 690-7033.

Register For Gov.’s Ag Development Summit

PIERRE — “South Dakota Agriculture Means Business” is the theme for the 2012 Governor’s Ag Development Summit in Pierre. To register for the June 27 summit, visit, <http://sdda.sd.gov> or call the South Dakota Department of Agriculture at 773-5436. The summit is open to anyone interested in how agriculture impacts South Dakota’s economy. There is no cost to attend. The Summit will engage participants in a thoughtful conversation on the business of South Dakota agriculture. As our state’s No. 1 industry continues to grow, the Summit will explore how to expand agricultural business — from increasing international trade and exports, to further developing the state’s livestock industry. The morning keynote speaker will be John Phipps, host of the U.S. Farm Report, followed by a panel discussion on Exporting and International Trade. Gov. Dennis Daugaard will present the 2012 Ag Ambassador award during lunch. The afternoon will continue with a panel discussion on Livestock Development, followed by an afternoon keynote speech on Succession Planning by Gary Sipiorski of VitaPlus. The Governor’s Ag Development Summit is made possible with support from Avera Health, Bayer Crop Science, CHS, Dacotah Bank, Farm Credit Services of America, First Dakota National Bank, Pfizer Animal Health, Pioneer, and Sanford Health.

FSA Crop Certification Deadline Is July 15

HURON — USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) State Executive Director Craig Schaunaman reminds producers that the annual crop certification deadline is July 15, 2012. Producers who file accurate and timely reports for all crops and land uses, including prevented planted and failed acreage can prevent the potential loss of FSA program benefits. “I encourage all producers to contact their local FSA office to make an appointment to file their annual acreage report by the July 15 deadline in order to comply with FSA program eligibility requirements,” said Schaunaman. South Dakota FSA offices no longer mail appointment cards and maps to producers for acreage reporting purposes. Producers are responsible for contacting their local FSA office to set up an appointment to file their 2012 acreage report. Hard copy maps will be provided to the producer at the time the acreage report is filed. Producers wishing to obtain digital color copies of their respective maps are encouraged to provide their e-mail address or a new jump drive to their local FSA office to facilitate the request for digital maps. Producers are also reminded to report crop losses insured through Federal Crop Insurance and the Noninsured Crop Disaster Assistance Program (NAP) within 15 days of the disaster or as soon as the loss is apparent. Additional information about the acreage reporting process or programs administered by FSA may be obtained by contacting your local FSA office or on the web at www.fsa.usda.gov.

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